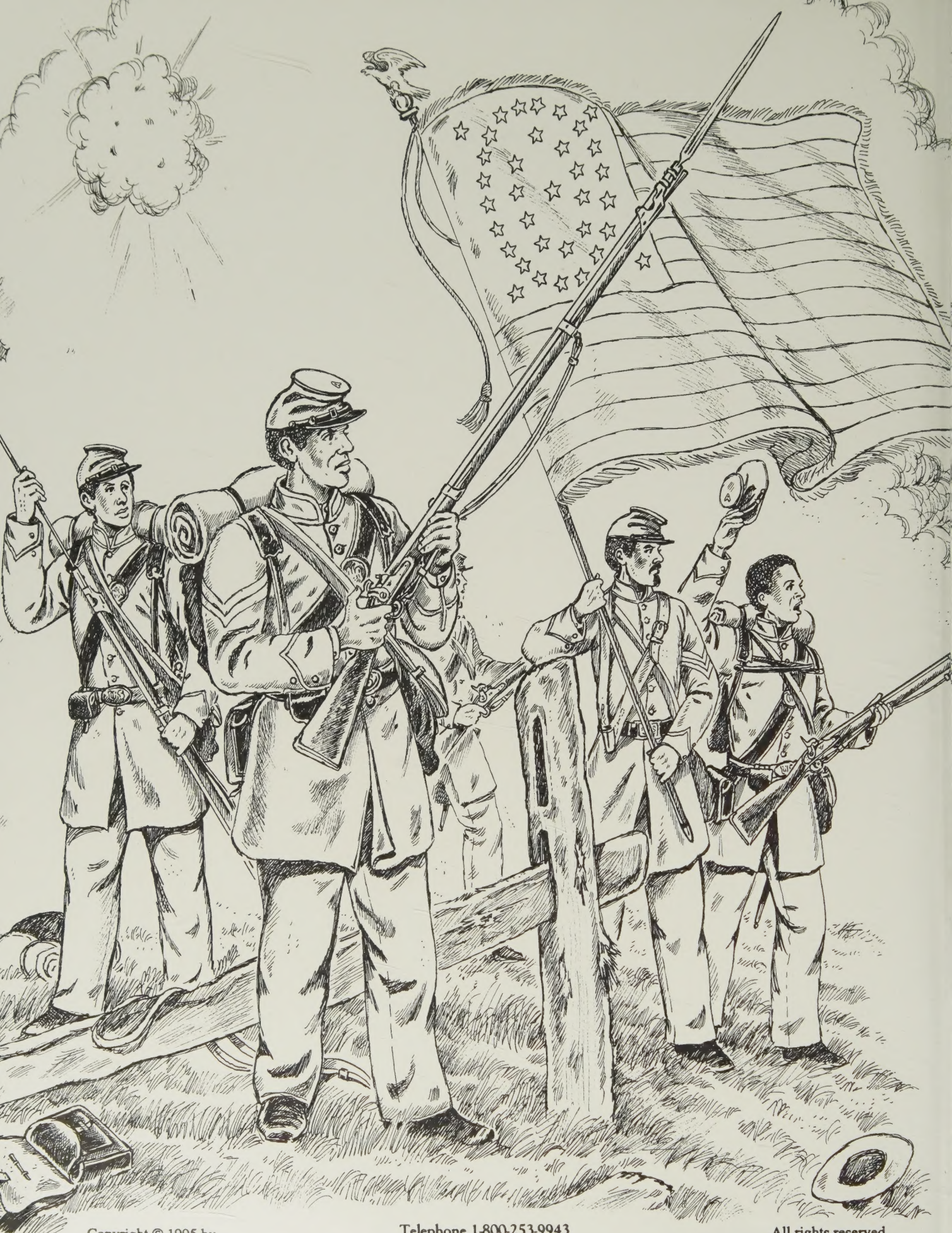


Black Soldiers in the Civil War

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Black Soldiers in the Civil War

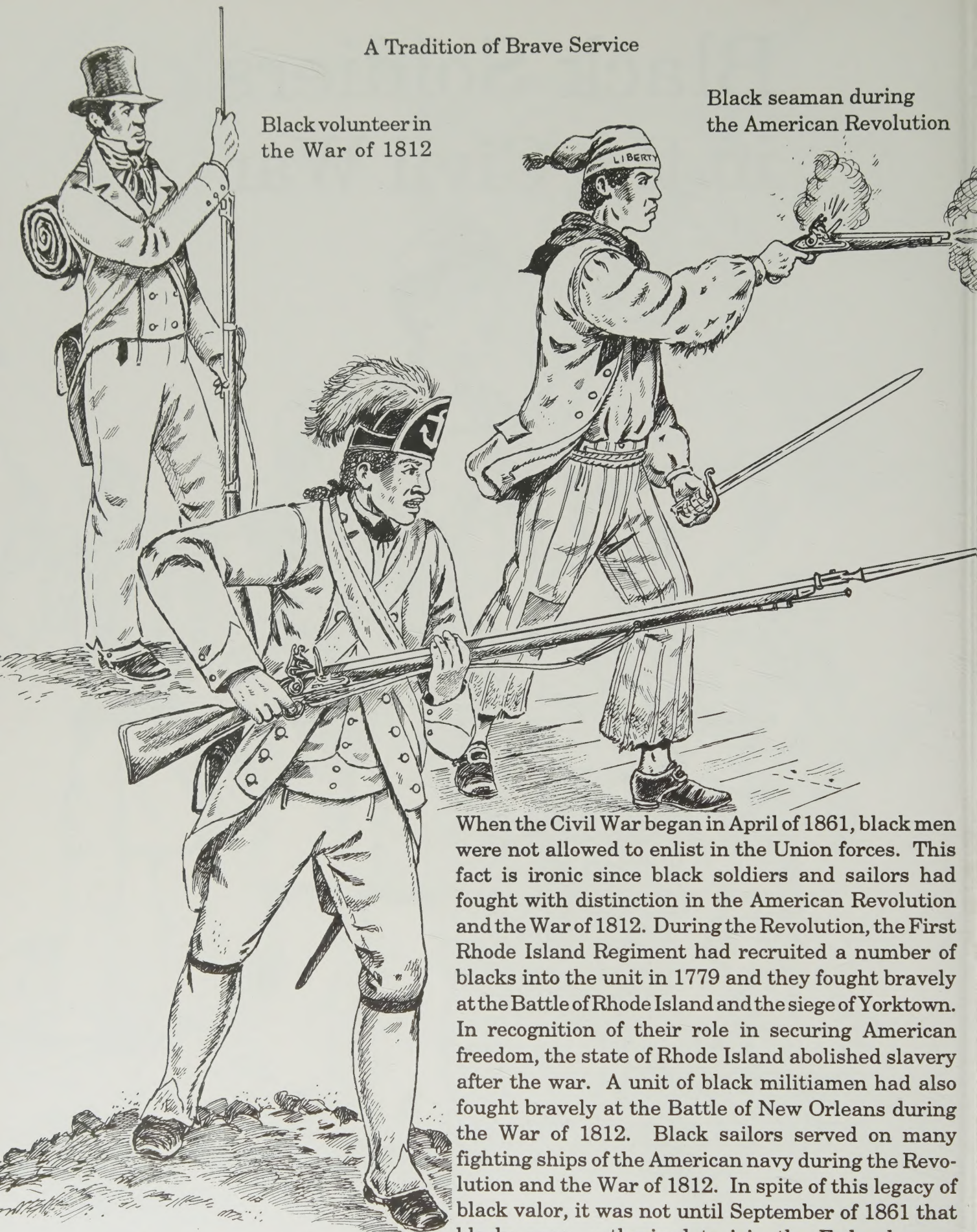


By Alan Archambault

A Tradition of Brave Service

Black volunteer in
the War of 1812

Black seaman during
the American Revolution



Rhode Island infantryman at the
siege of Yorktown, Virginia, 1781

When the Civil War began in April of 1861, black men were not allowed to enlist in the Union forces. This fact is ironic since black soldiers and sailors had fought with distinction in the American Revolution and the War of 1812. During the Revolution, the First Rhode Island Regiment had recruited a number of blacks into the unit in 1779 and they fought bravely at the Battle of Rhode Island and the siege of Yorktown. In recognition of their role in securing American freedom, the state of Rhode Island abolished slavery after the war. A unit of black militiamen had also fought bravely at the Battle of New Orleans during the War of 1812. Black sailors served on many fighting ships of the American navy during the Revolution and the War of 1812. In spite of this legacy of black valor, it was not until September of 1861 that blacks were authorized to join the Federal navy. Finally, in July, 1862, the Union army was given permission to recruit black soldiers.

MEN OF COLOR

To Arms! To Arms!

NOW OR NEVER

THREE YEARS' SERVICE!

AND JOIN IN FIGHTING THE

BATTLES OF LIBERTY AND THE UNION

FAIL NOW, & OUR RACE IS DOOMED

SILENCE THE TONGUE OF CALUMNY
VALOR AND HEROISM

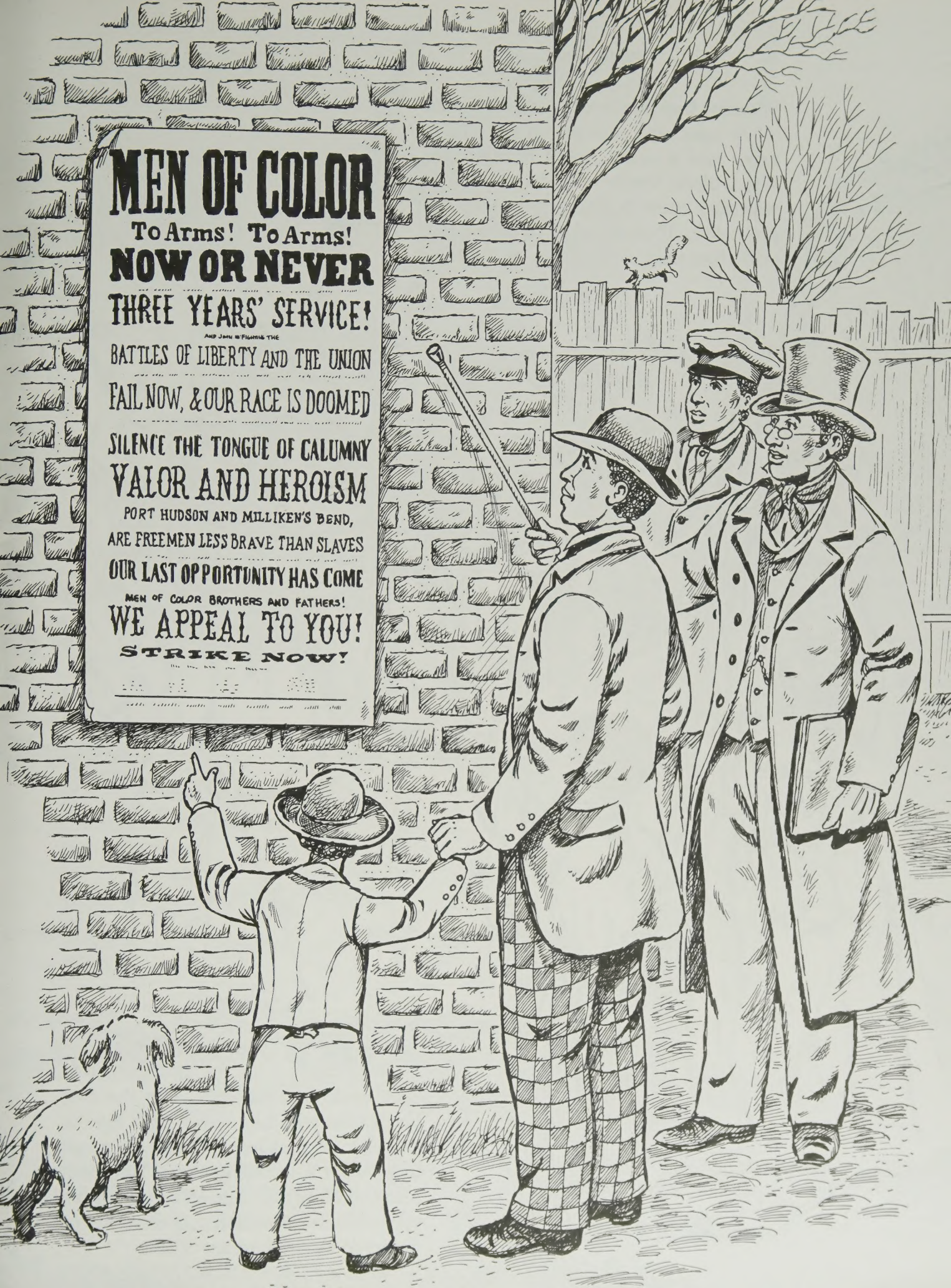
PORT HUDSON AND MILLIKEN'S BEND,
ARE FREEMEN LESS BRAVE THAN SLAVES

OUR LAST OPPORTUNITY HAS COME

MEN OF COLOR BROTHERS AND FATHERS!

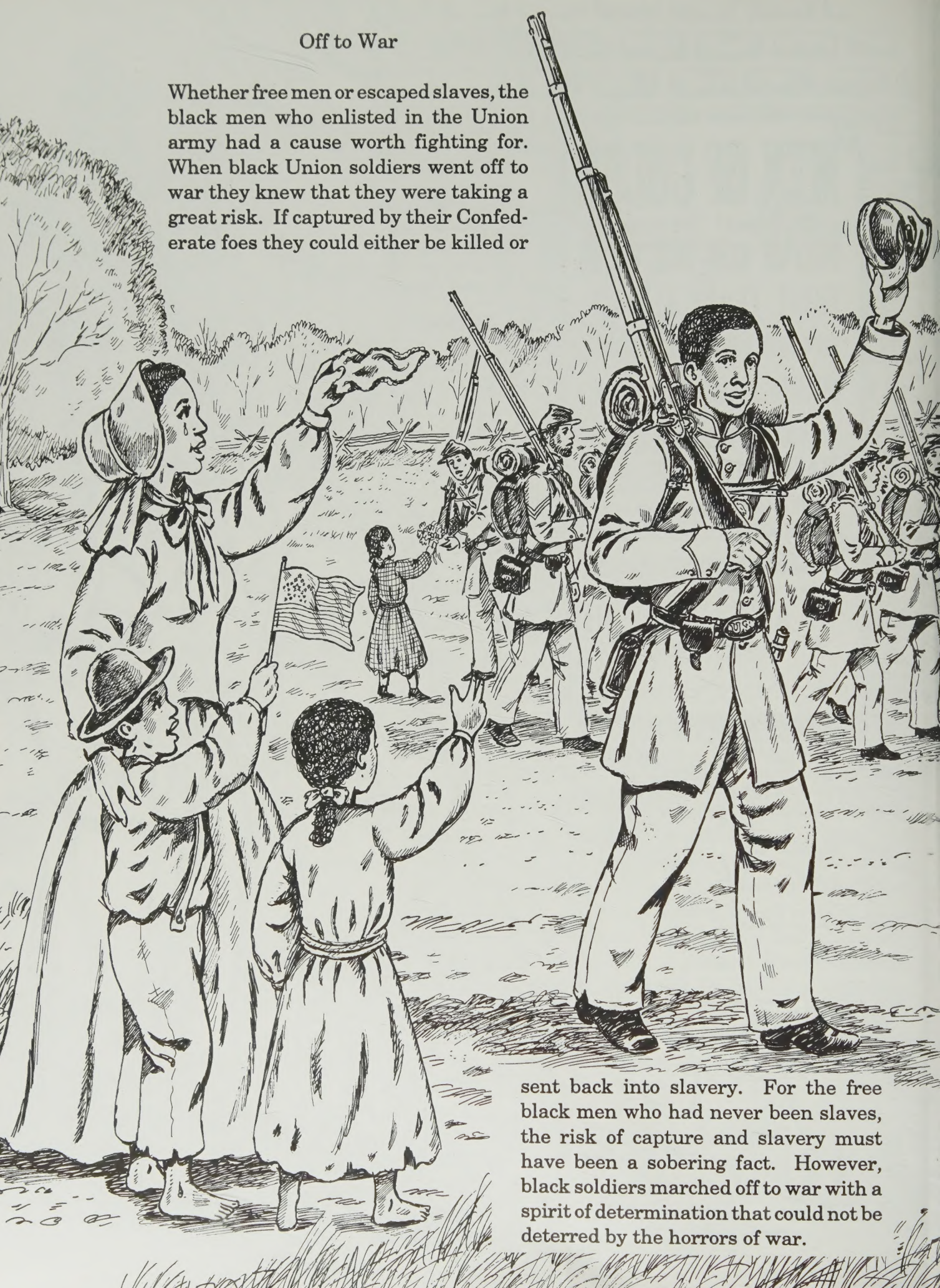
WE APPEAL TO YOU!

STRIKE NOW!



Off to War

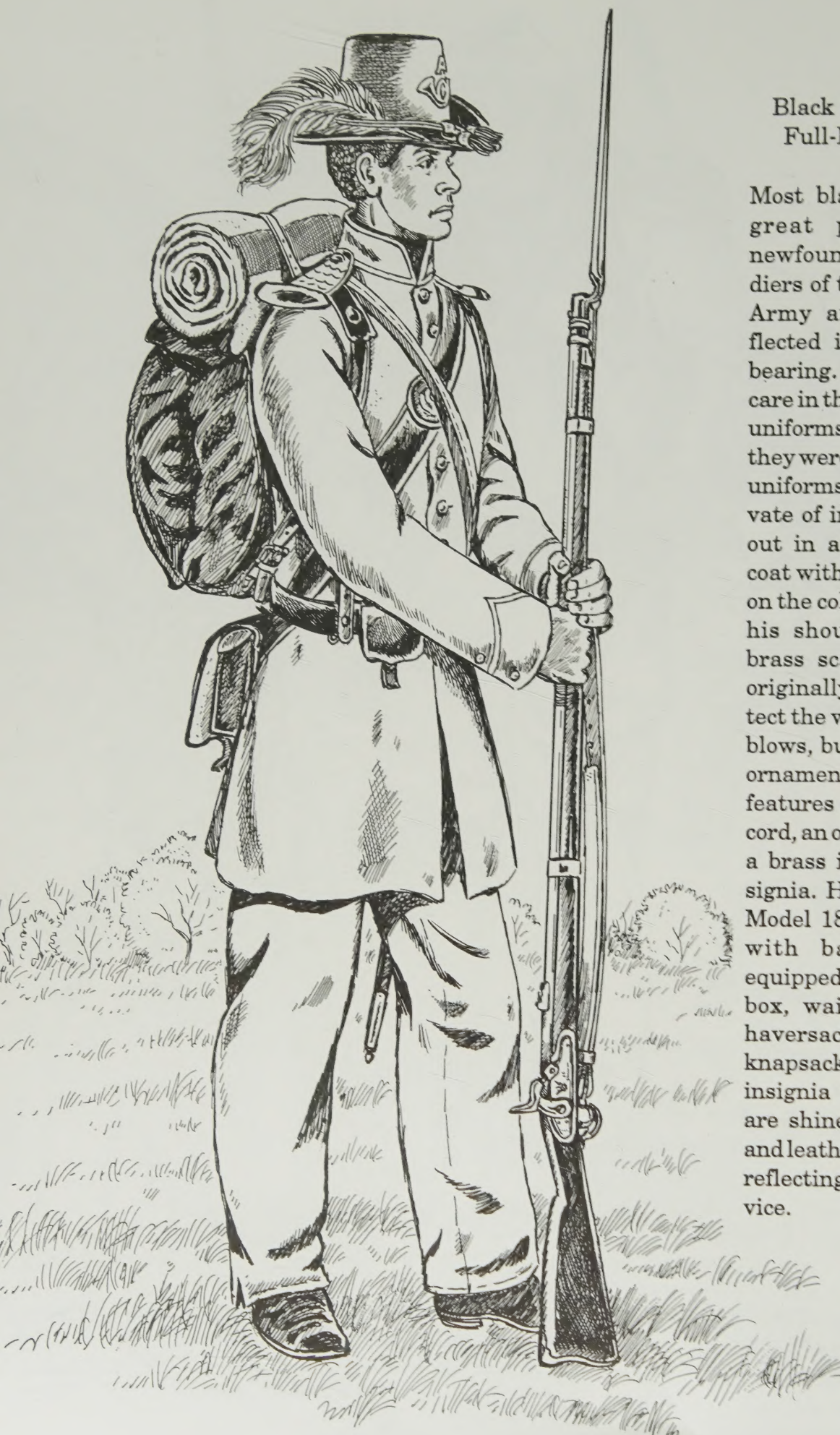
Whether free men or escaped slaves, the black men who enlisted in the Union army had a cause worth fighting for. When black Union soldiers went off to war they knew that they were taking a great risk. If captured by their Confederate foes they could either be killed or



sent back into slavery. For the free black men who had never been slaves, the risk of capture and slavery must have been a sobering fact. However, black soldiers marched off to war with a spirit of determination that could not be deterred by the horrors of war.



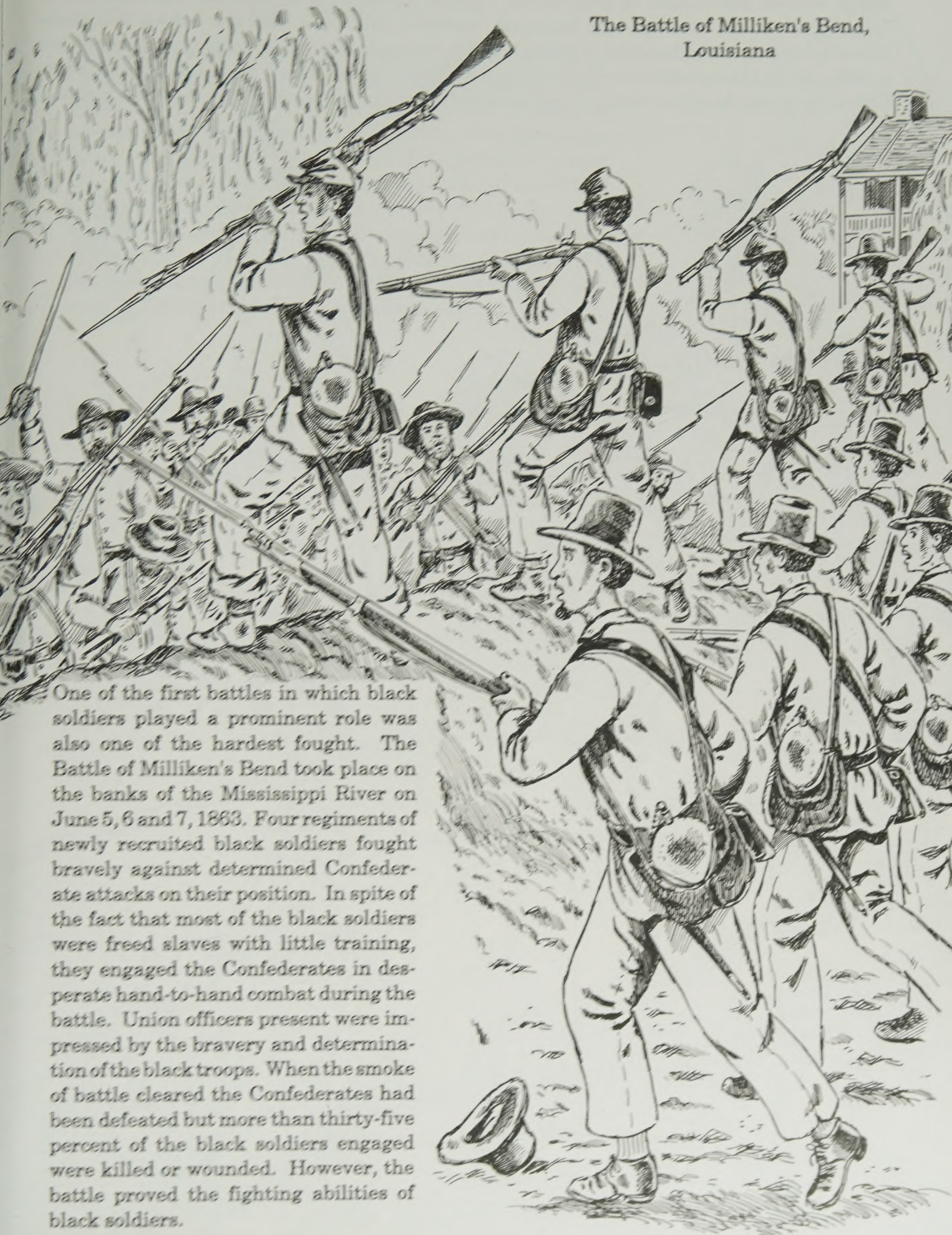
"Once let the black man get upon his person the brass letters U.S., let him get an eagle on his button and a musket on his shoulder and bullets in his pocket and there is no power on earth which can deny that he has earned the right to citizenship in the United States." - Frederick Douglass.



Black Infantryman in Full-Dress Uniform

Most black soldiers took great pride in their newfound status as soldiers of the United States Army and this was reflected in their soldierly bearing. They took special care in the wearing of their uniforms, especially when they were issued full-dress uniforms. This black private of infantry is decked out in a dark blue frock coat with light blue piping on the collar and cuffs. On his shoulders he sports brass scales which were originally intended to protect the wearer from saber blows, but were primarily ornamental. His dress hat features a light blue hat cord, an ostrich plume, and a brass infantry horn insignia. He is armed with a Model 1861 Rifle Musket with bayonet and is equipped with a cartridge box, waistbelt, cap box, haversack, canteen, and knapsack. All his brass insignia and his weapon are shined and his shoes and leather gear blackened reflecting his pride in service.

The Battle of Milliken's Bend, Louisiana



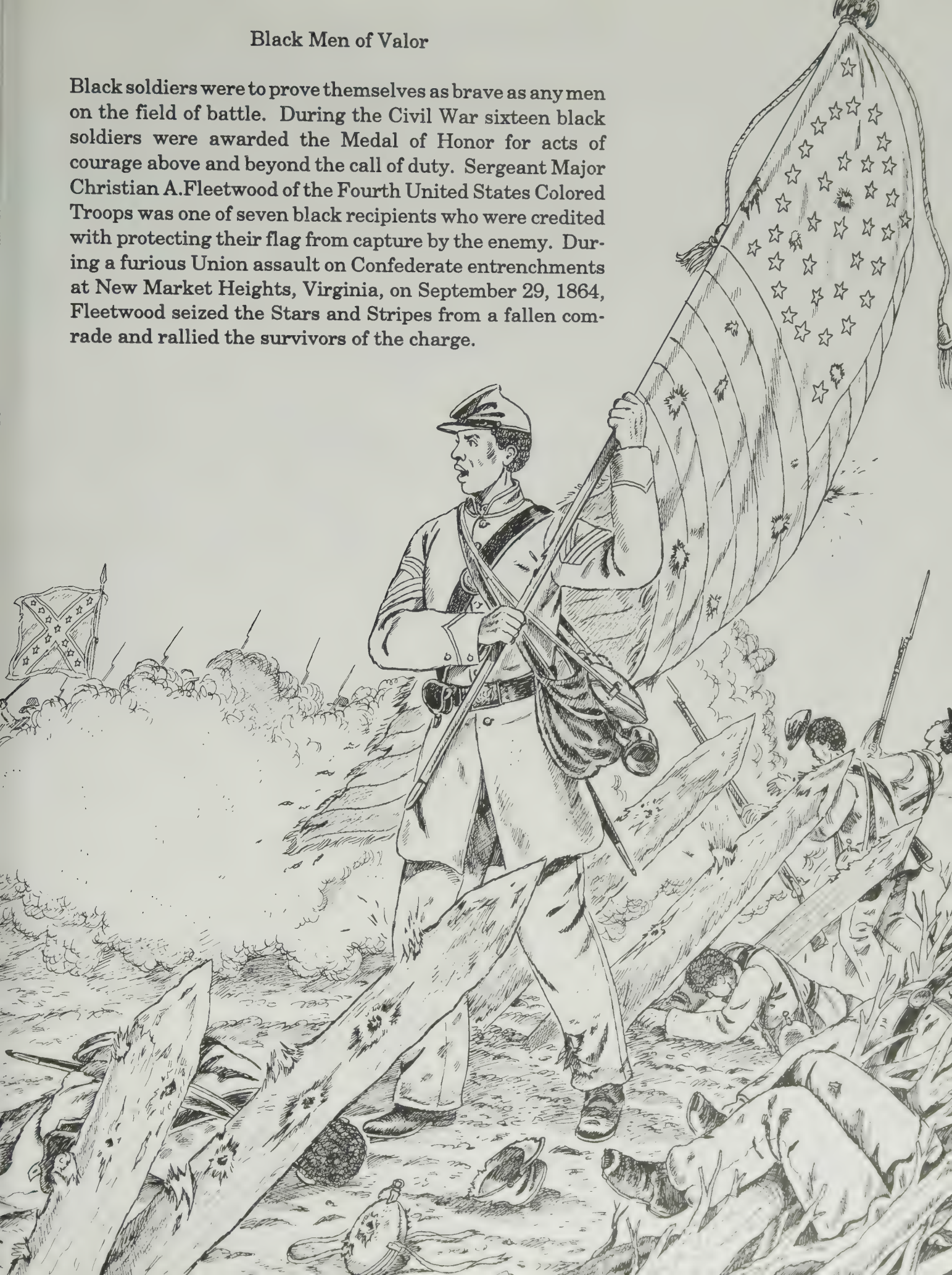
One of the first battles in which black soldiers played a prominent role was also one of the hardest fought. The Battle of Milliken's Bend took place on the banks of the Mississippi River on June 5, 6 and 7, 1863. Four regiments of newly recruited black soldiers fought bravely against determined Confederate attacks on their position. In spite of the fact that most of the black soldiers were freed slaves with little training, they engaged the Confederates in desperate hand-to-hand combat during the battle. Union officers present were impressed by the bravery and determination of the black troops. When the smoke of battle cleared the Confederates had been defeated but more than thirty-five percent of the black soldiers engaged were killed or wounded. However, the battle proved the fighting abilities of black soldiers.

Black women also fought to free slaves. Before the Civil War, Harriet Tubman was a "conductor" on the Underground Railroad. Between 1850 and 1860 she helped 300 black slaves escape north to freedom. During the war she and other black women were unofficial scouts, giving Union soldiers vital intelligence. Many black women served as nurses in the Union camps and hospitals while others helped soldiers who had escaped from Southern prisons.



Black Men of Valor

Black soldiers were to prove themselves as brave as any men on the field of battle. During the Civil War sixteen black soldiers were awarded the Medal of Honor for acts of courage above and beyond the call of duty. Sergeant Major Christian A. Fleetwood of the Fourth United States Colored Troops was one of seven black recipients who were credited with protecting their flag from capture by the enemy. During a furious Union assault on Confederate entrenchments at New Market Heights, Virginia, on September 29, 1864, Fleetwood seized the Stars and Stripes from a fallen comrade and rallied the survivors of the charge.



Respect between Officers and Men

When black soldiers were recruited into the Federal army, it was understood that they would be led by experienced white officers. When the War Department established the Bureau of Colored Troops, on May 22, 1863, one of its duties was to select competent Union officers to lead black units. Special consideration was given to men who sympathized with the abolitionist movement and the advancement of black Americans. Most white officers found their black soldiers to be loyal, disciplined, and brave. A special bond, forged by mutual respect, was often formed between the officers and enlisted men of black units. By the end of the war, several black soldiers were commissioned as officers in the Union army.

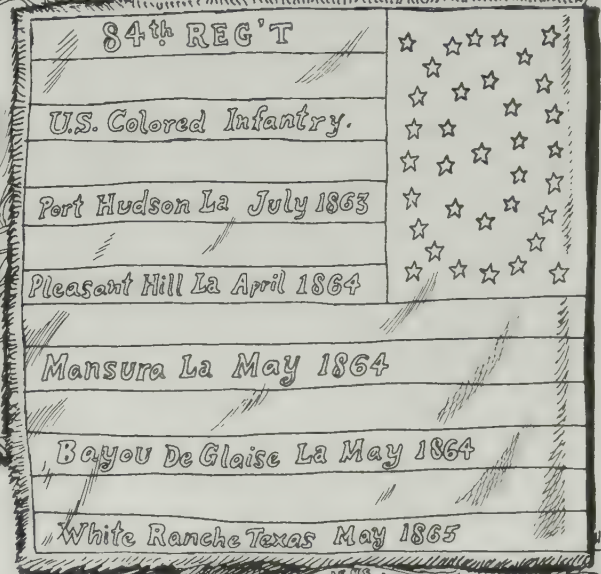


BATTLE FLAGS OF BLACK SOLDIERS OF THE CIVIL WAR

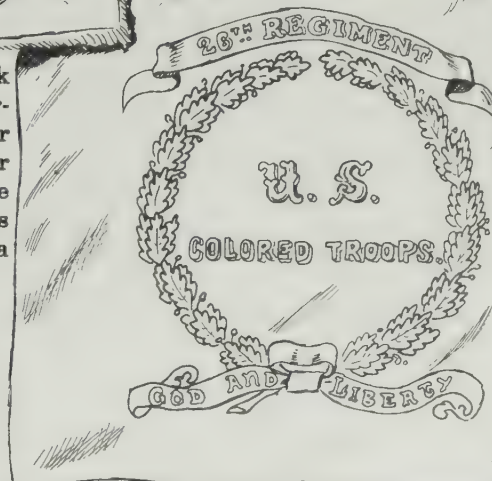
This regimental flag of the Sixth Infantry Regiment, United States Colored Troops, features a beautifully painted national eagle. It was presented to the regiment by the Colored Citizens of Philadelphia on August 31, 1863.



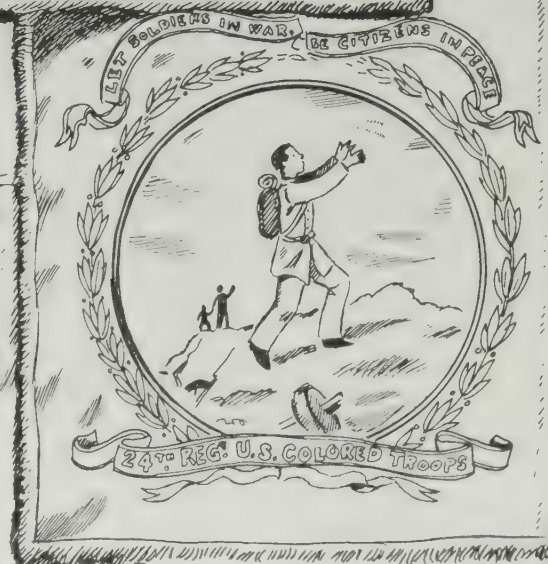
This National Color proudly displays the battle honors of the Eighty-Fourth Infantry Regiment, United States Colored Troops.



This emotional scene features a black infantryman bayoneting a Confederate soldier. The motto Sic Semper Tyrannis, meaning "May it be ever thus to tyrants," is ironically the state motto of Virginia. The design was painted by David Bustill Bowser, a black artist from Philadelphia.



This elegant flag features a dark blue field with an intricate motif painted in gold. The scrolls are red with gold letters.



This non-regulation regimental battle flag was also painted by David Bustill Bowser and features a black infantryman in an allegorical scene. This flag was carried by the Twenty-Fourth Infantry Regiment, United States Colored Troops.

Most Union regiments carried two flags into battle: the Stars and Stripes and a regimental flag. The flags of the black soldiers were of special significance since the men were fighting to free their race from the bonds of slavery. Many of their flags featured allegorical scenes and heroic inscriptions which reflected the high ideals and martial spirit of the black fighting men.

In February, 1863, recruitment began for the Fifty-Fourth Massachusetts, which was to be the first black regiment raised in the Northern states. Massachusetts Governor John A. Andrew took a special interest in the regiment and they were well trained and equipped prior to leaving the state in May, 1863. Colonel Robert Gould Shaw, the twenty-five-year-old son

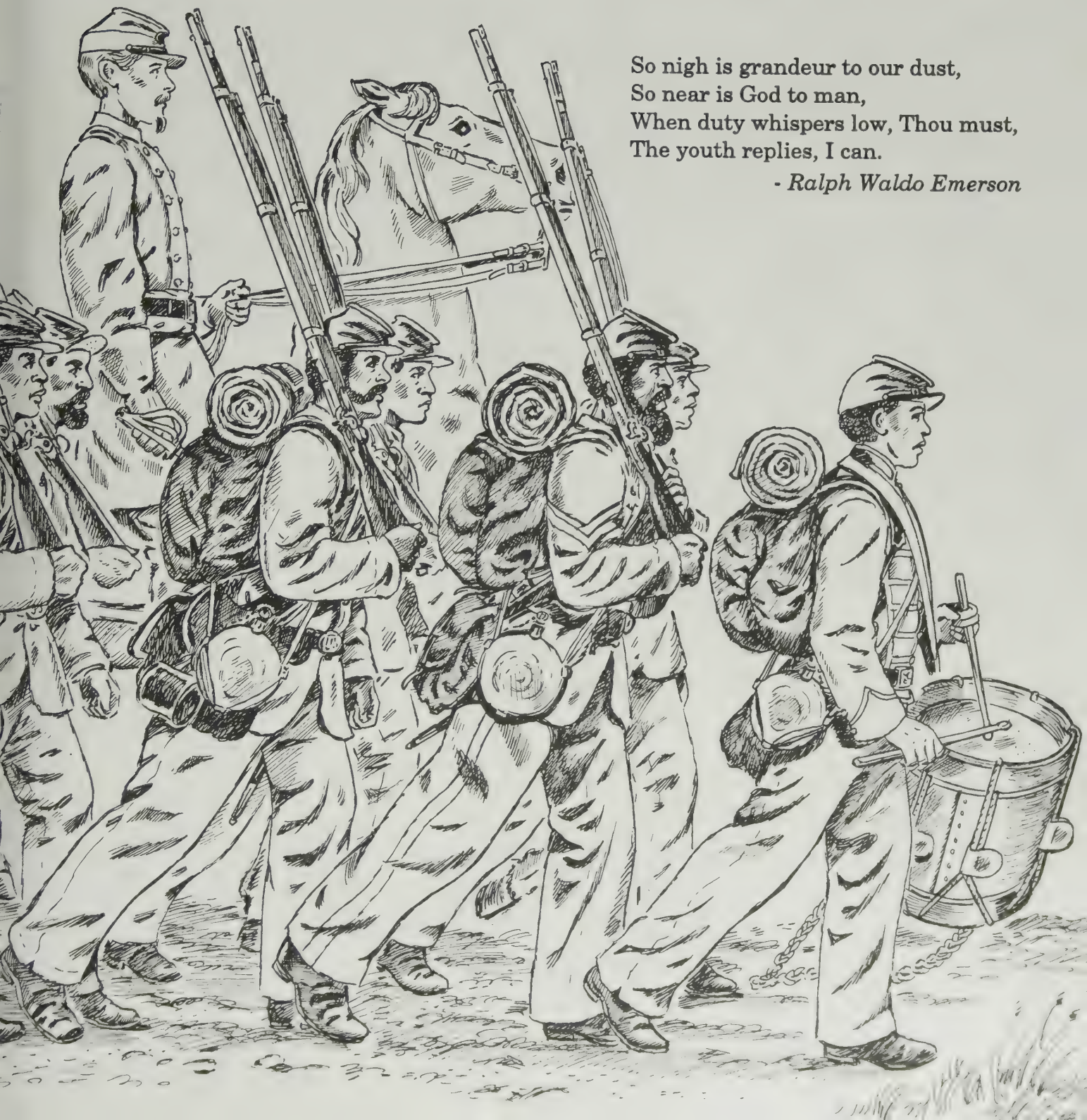


The Fifty-Fourth Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry

of a prominent Boston family, was given command of the regiment and he led them down to South Carolina to participate in the siege of Charleston. The Fifty-Fourth first came under fire on James Island on July 16, 1863, and fought with skill and courage. On July 18, the Fifty-Fourth led the Union attack on Fort Wagner, S.C.. The Confederate garrison defended the fort with determination and inflicted heavy casualties on the attacking Union troops. Despite their heavy losses, Colonel Shaw and his men were able to reach the parapets of Fort Wagner. Colonel Shaw shouted, "Forward Fifty-Fourth!" and then fell with a musket ball in the chest. After a fierce struggle, the Fifty-Fourth was forced to retreat. During the attack the regiment lost 259 of its 650 men. Although the attack was not successful, the men of the Fifty-Fourth Massachusetts proved that black soldiers were as brave as any men in either army.

So nigh is grandeur to our dust,
So near is God to man,
When duty whispers low, Thou must,
The youth replies, I can.

- Ralph Waldo Emerson



But the high soul burns on to light men's feet
Where death for noble ends makes dying sweet.

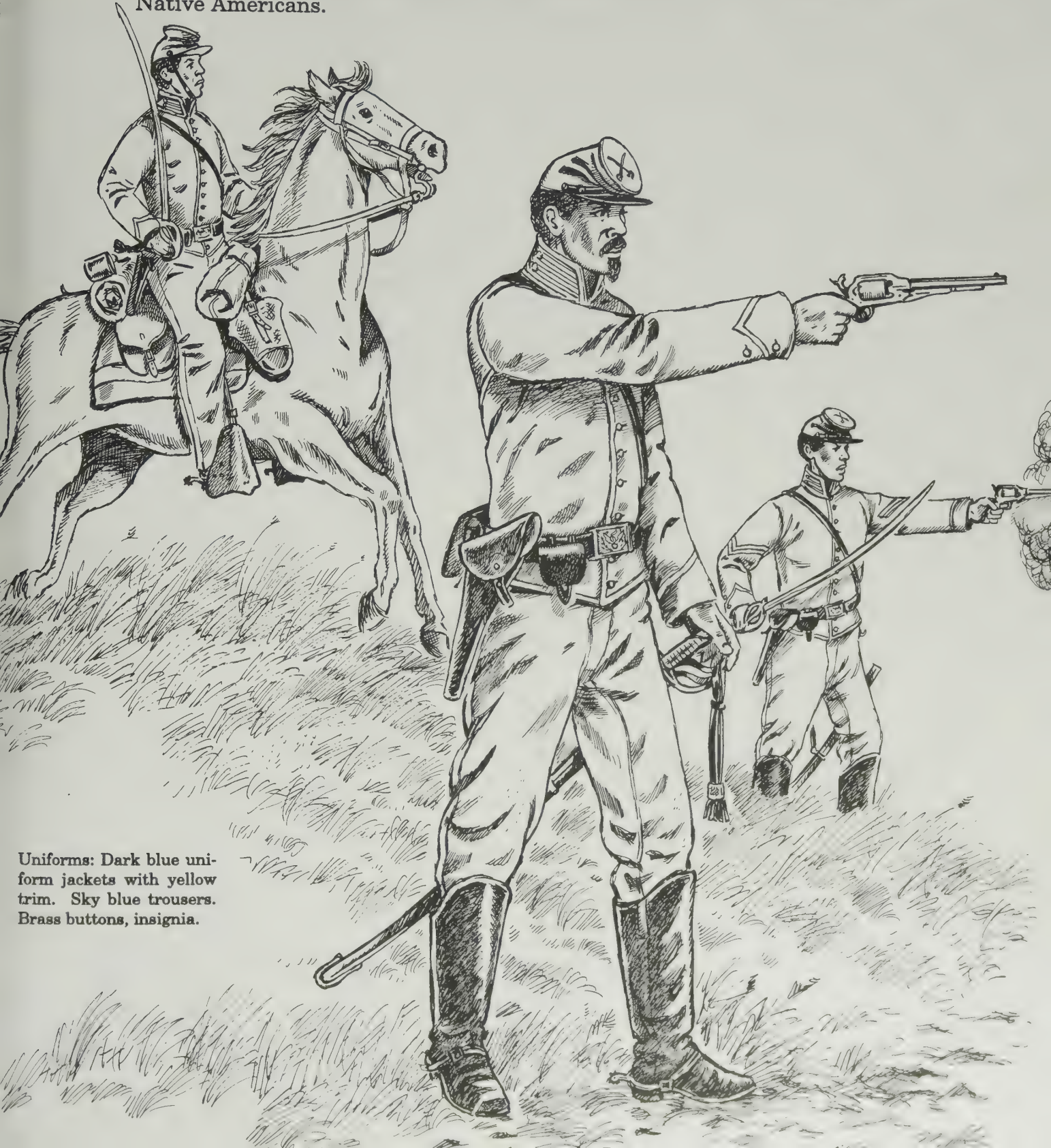
- James Russell Lowell, 1863



The Fifty-Four
Mass. Vol. Inf

Black Cavalrymen

The United States Cavalry was the most dashing of all the branches of the Union army and the black soldiers who served as horse soldiers had reason to be proud of their service. Seven regiments of black cavalrymen were recruited during the Civil War and they participated in skirmishes and battles from Virginia to Louisiana. Following the war, two regiments of black cavalrymen were organized to serve on the Western frontier. Designated the Ninth and Tenth Cavalry Regiments, these hard-riding men were nicknamed the "Buffalo Soldiers" by the Native Americans.



Uniforms: Dark blue uniform jackets with yellow trim. Sky blue trousers. Brass buttons, insignia.



The Battle of the Crater, Petersburg, Virginia, July 30, 1864

Battle of the Crater

In an attempt to break the siege of Petersburg, Union soldiers dug a tunnel under the Confederate positions. Gunpowder was placed in the tunnel and on July 30, 1864 a gap was blown in the Southern lines. Following the explosion, Union troops advanced to break the Confederate defences. Unfortunately, the attack was poorly planned and the attacking Union troops, including many black soldiers, stumbled into the large crater left by the blast and were slaughtered by the determined Confederate defenders who rallied around the rim of the crater.

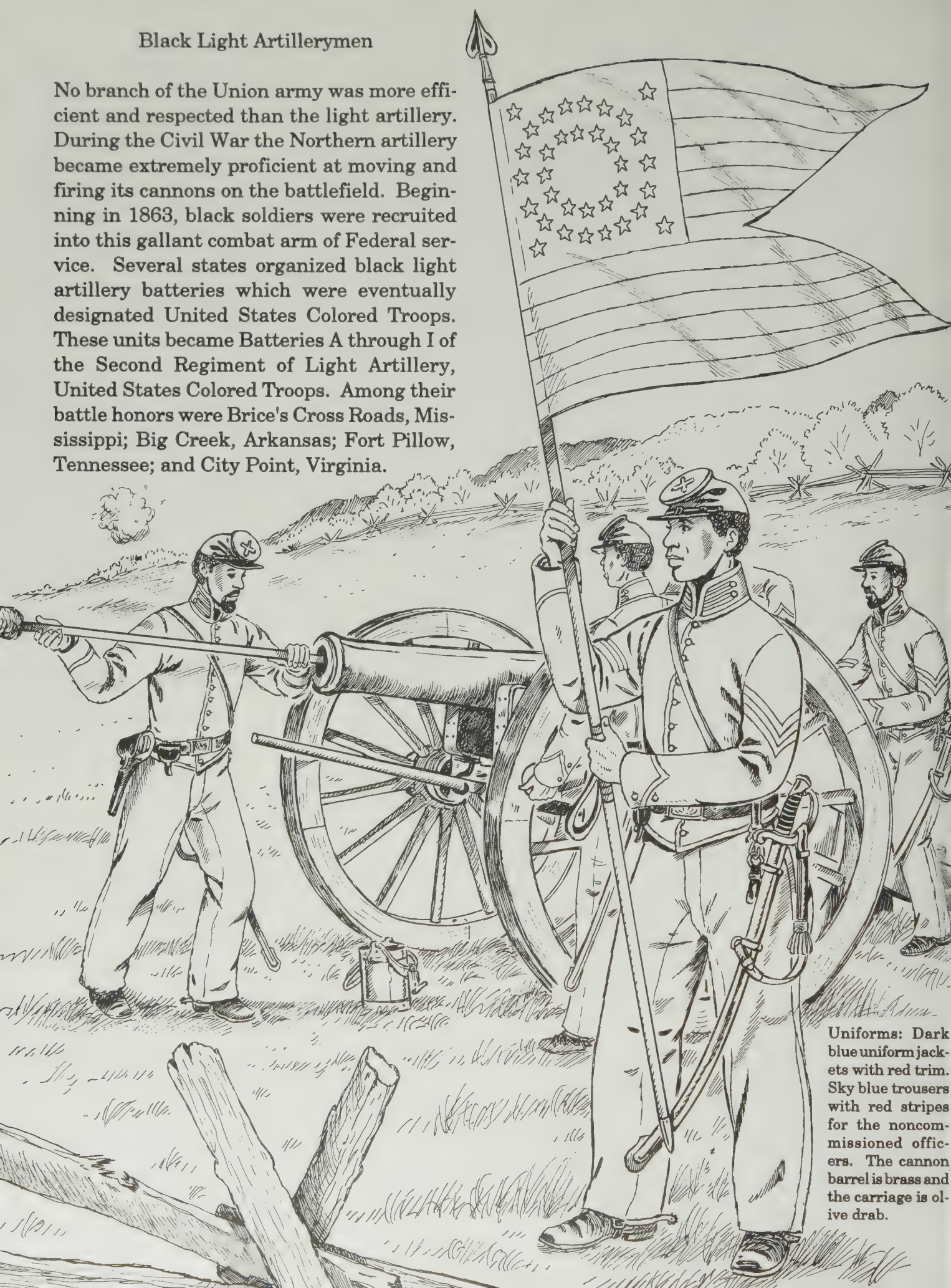


This determined young soldier wears typical Union fatigue dress and is armed with a .58 caliber Springfield rifle musket and bayonet. On his chest he wears a Ninth Army Corps badge which was a non-issue item purchased from a sutler. His regiment was assigned to the Fourth Division of the Ninth Corps, Army of the Potomac. Black soldiers serving with the Ninth Army Corps fought valiantly at the Battle of the Crater on July 30, 1864 sustaining heavy casualties in the process. Thirty-eight regiments of black troops served with the Union army besieging Petersburg - more than in any other campaign of the Civil War. They greatly contributed to the ultimate Union victory.

Private, 23rd Infantry
Regiment, U.S. Colored
Troops, Petersburg,
Virginia, 1864

Black Light Artillerymen

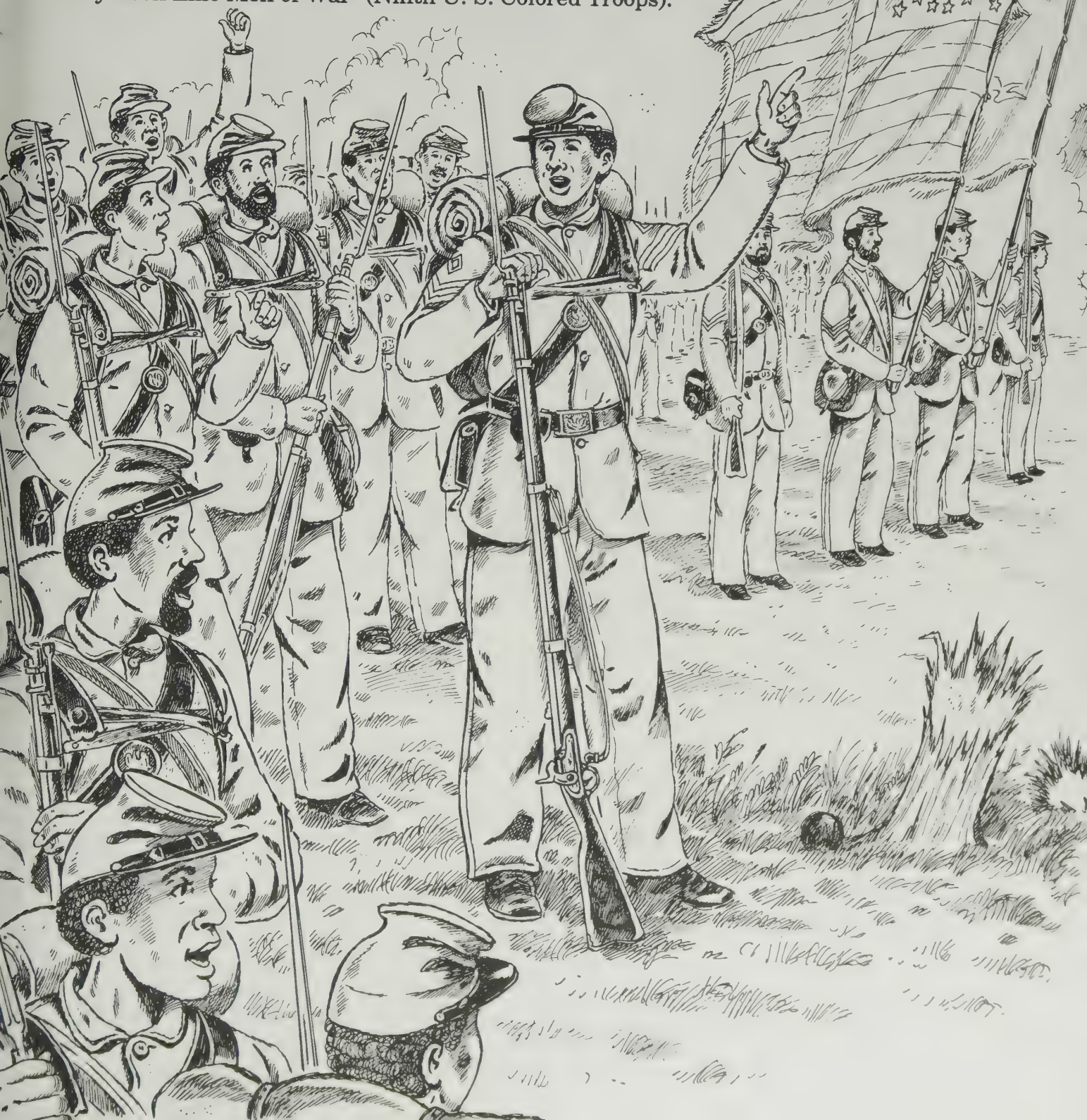
No branch of the Union army was more efficient and respected than the light artillery. During the Civil War the Northern artillery became extremely proficient at moving and firing its cannons on the battlefield. Beginning in 1863, black soldiers were recruited into this gallant combat arm of Federal service. Several states organized black light artillery batteries which were eventually designated United States Colored Troops. These units became Batteries A through I of the Second Regiment of Light Artillery, United States Colored Troops. Among their battle honors were Brice's Cross Roads, Mississippi; Big Creek, Arkansas; Fort Pillow, Tennessee; and City Point, Virginia.

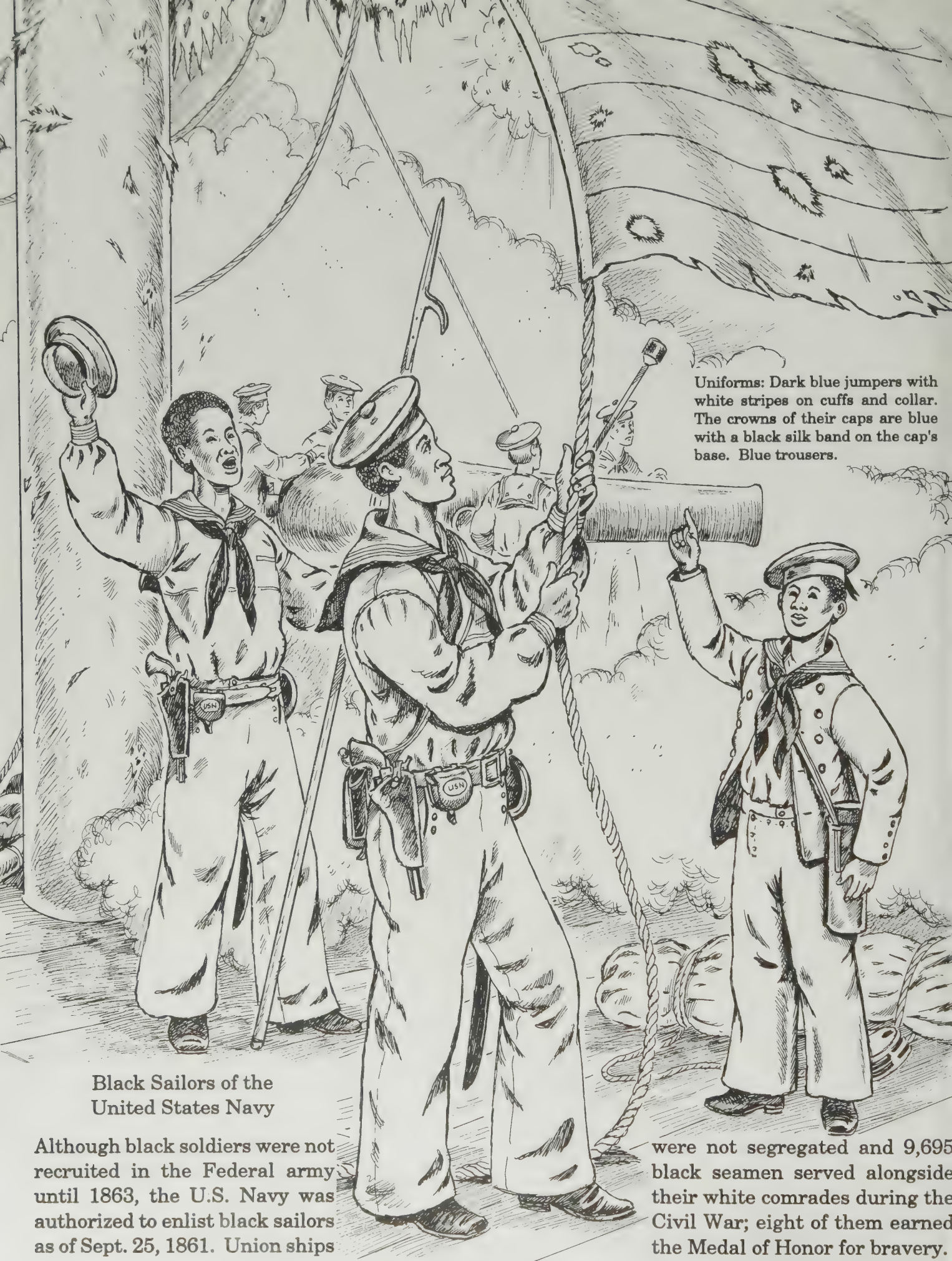


Uniforms: Dark blue uniform jackets with red trim. Sky blue trousers with red stripes for the noncommissioned officers. The cannon barrel is brass and the carriage is olive drab.

Music of the Black Soldiers

Black Americans have a rich musical heritage and this was reflected in the popularity of music among the ranks of the black units of the Union army. Black regiments became noted for singing in camp, on the march, and even on the battlefield. Black soldiers sang all the songs popular with their white comrades, but several songs were written by black soldiers to express their pride in their units. Among those songs were "Give Us A Flag" (Fifty-Fourth Massachusetts), "The Second Louisiana," "The Marching Song of the First Arkansas," and "They Look Like Men of War" (Ninth U. S. Colored Troops).





Uniforms: Dark blue jumpers with white stripes on cuffs and collar. The crowns of their caps are blue with a black silk band on the cap's base. Blue trousers.

Black Sailors of the United States Navy

Although black soldiers were not recruited in the Federal army until 1863, the U.S. Navy was authorized to enlist black sailors as of Sept. 25, 1861. Union ships

were not segregated and 9,695 black seamen served alongside their white comrades during the Civil War; eight of them earned the Medal of Honor for bravery.

The Black Soldier: Hero to his People

When black Union soldiers, many of whom had been slaves, returned to the South to free those blacks still in bondage, they were viewed as liberators. To black Americans, the black Union soldier, with his blue uniform and gleaming musket, was an avenging angel who had come to set them free. Often black soldiers were met with cheers and patriotic songs, especially from the children, who could now look forward to a new life. There was a special significance in freedom won by black men in blue uniforms.

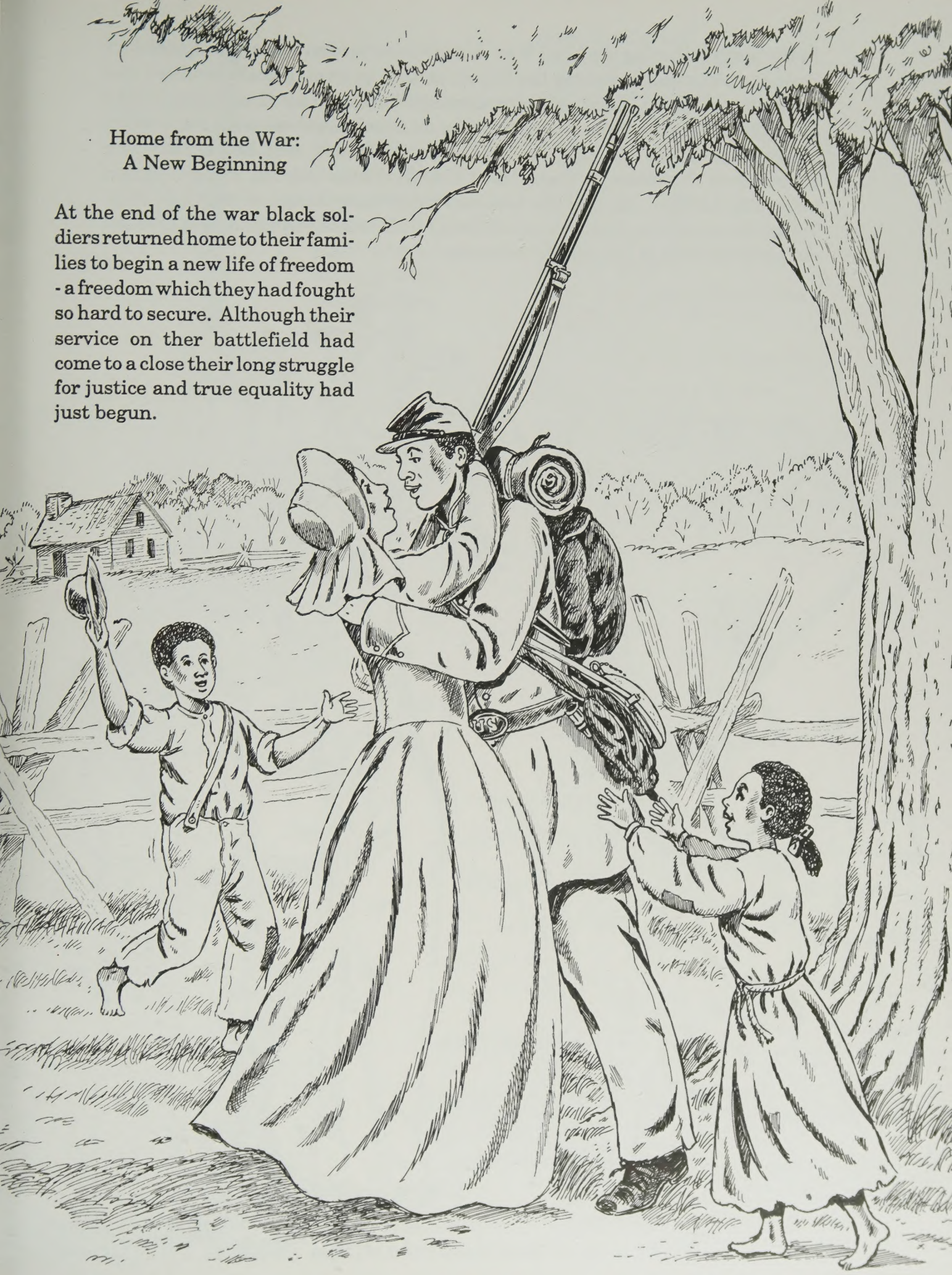


Towards the end of the Civil War, the forces of the Confederacy were being overwhelmed by the superior numbers of Union troops. In many instances, Confederate soldiers were taken prisoner by black Union soldiers, many of whom were recently freed slaves. In several recorded incidents, Southern slaveowners were actually taken prisoner by their former slaves, adding to their humiliation. There is a story that in one such case a black Union soldier told his former owner that "the bottom rail was on the top now."



Home from the War: A New Beginning

At the end of the war black soldiers returned home to their families to begin a new life of freedom - a freedom which they had fought so hard to secure. Although their service on their battlefield had come to a close their long struggle for justice and true equality had just begun.



In the years following the Civil War, black Union veterans were recognized for their contributions in saving the Union as well as freeing their brothers and sisters from slavery. Black veterans were entitled to join the Grand Army of the Republic, a Union veterans organization, as equal members with their white comrades-in-arms. On July 15, 1951, Joseph Clovese, who had served as a drummer in Company G, Sixty-Third United States Colored Troops, passed away into history. He was the last surviving black soldier of the Civil War. Today, we remember the service of all those black Americans who fought to make our nation a land of freedom for all races.



Black Veterans of the Civil War

**I'm marching
out to find
*The Black
Cowboy*, just
\$2.50 at your
store or from
Bellerophon.**



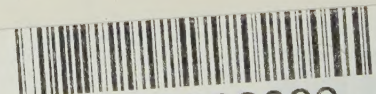
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